

Records Management Advice

Issued: November 2021

Improving Agency Records Management: How Managing Records Helps with Public Records Requests

Purpose: Provide guidance to state and local government agencies on how records management helps fulfill the requirements of the Public Records Act (chapter 42.56 RCW).

Agencies create and receive a mountain of paper and electronic records in the course of day-to-day business. Fortunately, an agency that proactively manages its records at each stage in their life cycle can identify what no longer needs to be kept, dispose of it appropriately, and organize what remains for quick and complete Public Records Act (PRA) compliance.

CREATE or RECEIVE

•To lay the groundwork for straightforward public disclosure, centralize and assign responsibility for records management, document policies and procedures governing all formats, and train staff to organize and manage their records.

DESTROY or PRESERVE

• Release your agency from the responsibility of public disclosure through documented destruction of records that have met retention and transfer of archival records to Washington State Archives for permanent preservation.

USE

•To find what you need, when you need it, organize records for accessibility, regularly conduct a records inventory, and adopt appropriate technology tools to simplify management.

STORE

 To legally satisfy PRA requests and fulfill your obligations to your agency and the public, retain records in an appropriate format for the required period of time, and prepare essential records for possible emergencies.

Additional advice regarding the Public Records Act is available from the Office of the Attorney General: http://www.atg.wa.gov/opengovernment.aspx

Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from Washington State Archives:

www.sos.wa.gov/archives recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov